

## Promising Practice: Lunch and Learn

### Will County on Behalf of the Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago (WBMC)

#### Healthcare Careers—Skilled Workers, Strong Earnings

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Healthcare Careers—Skilled Workers, Strong Earnings is a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program, funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. The program features Lunch and Learn, a monthly job readiness workshop for program participants, which also functions as a peer support club. During Lunch and Learn sessions, students have an opportunity to get to know each other while receiving training on resume writing and interview skills. In a recent session, program staff helped students set up Linked-In accounts.

Many of the program's students have not been in school for many years or were not particularly successful when they were in school. For some students, these experiences engendered a fear of educational institutions and the classroom environment. Program case managers were looking for ways to help students overcome barriers like these so they could return to school and be successful.

Program staff recognized that peer support was a strong element contributing to student success in the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program. Students got to know each other in the classroom and clinical settings, and many stayed connected through social media while completing their prerequisite course work for Nursing or Occupational Therapy Assistant programs.

The Lunch and Learn sessions were created to add to the peer support available through the program. Lunch and Learn sessions help students maintain relationships with their fellow participants and case managers in an informal setting, while providing an opportunity to learn or reinforce job readiness skills, soft skills, and personal development.

Students are encouraged to suggest the topics for future meetings. Among the suggestions have been Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree requirements, how to advance along a career path, various topics related to employment, and if students should join honor societies. Students have been encouraged to share their work experiences, both positive and negative, as a starting point for problem solving.

While offering pizza or a sandwich is an important component of Lunch and Learn, it is obvious that the food is not the only reason a student participates. Feedback has been very positive as students return monthly.

## **Promising Practice: Interdepartmental Collaboration for Healthcare Bridge Programs Will County on behalf of the Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago (WBMC)**

Will County operates the Healthcare Careers—Skilled Workers, Strong Earnings HPOG program on behalf of the Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago (WBMC). The program provides healthcare training to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and low-income individuals in Chicago and 10 surrounding Illinois counties. Program services are coordinated through three local community-based organizations and three community colleges. One of the colleges, Joliet Junior College (JJC), enrolls HPOG participants in a career bridge program that targets the Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) or the Pharmacy Technician career pathway. A key to the program's success has been how JJC's inter-related departments work as a team to implement and deliver project services.

The college's Communications and External Relations Office applies a marketing plan that is inclusive of all advertising opportunities, including radio, television, newspaper, and professional publications. The college uses a variety of resources that support community outreach and recruitment, including a Community & Corporate Services catalog that is mailed to each household within the district. HPOG materials are incorporated in the college's brochures and flyers, and the comprehensive JJC and workforce development Web site.

The Department of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) leads the provision of Adult Education, Basic Skills, GED preparation, high school credit, and ESL programs and services to the target populations. A comprehensive array of support services are provided to HPOG participants, including tutorial assistance, career exploration, and college and career transition services. DAEL has facilitated the Math for Healthcare Professionals and Math for Pharmacy Technician courses.

The Community & Corporate Services (CCS) department is known for their expertise in developing employer-driven, customized training programs. CCS has facilitated the bridge programs that prepare students for the college's occupational training. Courses include:

- Computer Basics
- Spanish for Healthcare Professionals
- Keyboarding
- Medical Terminology

The Workforce Development Department supports participants with the KeyTrain curriculum to increase reading and math foundational skills, and employment assistance. Career readiness classes are facilitated and administered by Workforce Development staff. Participants entering the Certified Nurse Assistant pathway can advance into the LPN, and eventually into the RN, programs after completing the occupational training programs operated by the Nursing and Allied Health Departments. While Joliet Junior College partners with a wide variety of outside organizations to serve HPOG participants, it has been careful to ensure internal collaboration as well to prevent the potential of silo effects from limiting the success of the organization and the HPOG program.

